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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000064

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [EFIN](#) [EINV](#) [EI](#)
SUBJECT: IRELAND SUPPORTS SINIORA GOVERNMENT WITHIN EU
CORRIDORS

REF: A. STATE 10786

[1](#)B. STATE 11025

Classified By: Pol/Econ Section Chief Ted Pierce;
Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Irish Government is under no illusions about the "single-minded brutality" of the Syrian regime, according to Michael Gaffey, a senior Foreign Affairs official. He added that Ireland and the EU must ensure the sovereignty and independence of the Government of Lebanon. However, he noted that the isolation and inflexibility of the Syrian regime made it unlikely that additional pressure would have a positive effect. Describing Siniora as an exceptionally strong individual, Gaffey noted that both the Irish Prime Minister and Foreign Minister were very impressed with him. Gaffey promised to initiate a discussion within the Irish Government regarding funding for the Tribunal; which, he said, was likely to be forthcoming. While the Irish Government will push hard within the corridors of the EU to garner support for Lebanon, in the end it is likely to accede to the consensus that emerges from the EU debate. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) POLOFF delivered demarche (Ref A) on February 6, 2008 to Michael Gaffey, Director, Middle East and North Africa Division, Department of Foreign Affairs. Beginning by noting that the people of Ireland were genuinely sympathetic to the Government of Lebanon (having been engaged in UNIFIL for many years), Gaffey stated that it is in the interests of Ireland and the EU to ensure the sovereignty and independence of the Government of Lebanon. He portrayed Lebanon as a victim of instability throughout the region, noting that any problem in the Middle East seems to end up being fought out in Lebanon. In Ireland's view, a comprehensive Middle East settlement, which achieves peace between Israel and Syria, is the best way to resolve the political problems in Lebanon, Gaffey said.

[1](#)3. (C) Calling on his own experience dealing with Syria -- including a visit there in early 2007 with Prime Minister (Taoiseach) Bertie Ahern and Foreign Minister Dermot Ahern -- Gaffey stated the Irish Government is under no illusions about the "single-minded brutality" of the Syrian regime, which, he said, was unlikely to hold genuine elections or become more accommodating. He described the regime as isolated (even from other Arab states) and interfering in Lebanon (e.g., orchestrating the assassination of Lebanese leaders) in a manner it thinks best meets its own narrow interests. (Note: Ireland's relations with Syria are conducted from their embassy in Cairo. End note.)

[1](#)4. (C) Gaffey stated that the EU must hang tough on Lebanon and send a strong message to Syria that Lebanon will not become a victim of any peace agreement in the Middle East;

for example, that Lebanese sovereignty will not be sacrificed for an Israeli/Syrian peace agreement. The EU, he declared, must be a guarantor of Lebanese sovereignty. He noted that if Syria chose, its actions in Lebanon could demonstrate its interest in a comprehensive regional peace settlement. However, he wondered whether additional pressure on Syria would really make any impact as Syria is already immensely isolated. In 2007, when his delegation also visited Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Gaffey said that the leaders of those nations seemed to be holding Syria at a long arm's length.

¶5. (C) Describing Siniora as an exceptionally strong individual, Gaffey said that both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister were very impressed with him during their meetings in Lebanon last year. He revealed that Siniora had immediately called the Prime Minister in early January to express his concern when two Irish troops in Lebanon were lightly wounded. Gaffey voiced the opinion that Siniora has been doing an excellent job of cultivating European leaders.

¶6. (C) Gaffey stated that Syria seems to fear the Special Tribunal on Lebanon. He indicated that he would initiate a discussion within the Irish Government on financial support for the Tribunal; a discussion, he said, that has not yet occurred. He voiced his opinion that Ireland would agree to pledge funding, noting that the establishment of the Tribunal was in keeping with Ireland's position on Lebanon and its strong support for human rights throughout the world.

¶7. (C) Comment: Ireland's instincts are in the right place. However, as Gaffey pointed out, Ireland is a small nation and can influence EU and international policy only so far. While the Irish Government will push hard within the corridors of the EU to garner support for Lebanon, in the end it is likely to accede to the consensus decision that emerges

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from the EU.

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